

Children affected by the imprisonment of a family member

A handbook for schools
developing good practice

**Believe in
children**



Barnardo's
Northern Ireland

May 2015



“

The school has been absolutely fantastic.

*Three other children in his classroom –
their parents are in prison, so when I went to
the teacher it was just like “no, this is absolutely
fine, it’s not gonna be an issue”.*

(Gill, 2009)

“

*We have no children whose parents are
or have ever been in prison in this school.*

(Morgan et al, 2014)



*[Other people] shouldn't know.
There is still stigma. People would think that
everybody in the family [was] like that.
[The] school might think they are the same as
their father. There is a lot of ignorance around.*

(Gill, 2009)

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Foreword



At Barnardo's NI we recognise that children affected by the imprisonment of a family member are often the forgotten victims of crime. They face many challenges, including significant pressure during the period of imprisonment and the risk of poorer outcomes afterwards.

Having a parent or other family member in prison can impact on a child's sense of identity and how they interact with their family and community. Equally importantly, it can impact on their lives in school and in wider society. Schooling, in particular, is the most universal service provision for children, however many organisations come into contact with children affected by having a family member in prison. It is therefore crucial that schools and other key agencies are supported to recognise and address those children's needs.

Barnardo's NI has over twenty years experience working in Northern Ireland's prisons and provides a range of parenting programmes aimed at maintaining contact and supporting parent/child relationships. Our work is based on trying to see the 'whole child' in order to understand the wider impact of having a family member in prison.

Barnardo's NI is also involved in influencing work to raise awareness about the needs of this group of children and to support partnership approaches that meet those needs. This handbook is part of that influencing work and has been adapted from an initial handbook produced by Barnardo's South West and a subsequent version tailored for Wales by Barnardo's Cymru.

Our intention with this handbook is to produce a readily accessible resource that can help schools in Northern Ireland support children affected by parental imprisonment. While primarily aimed at schools, it is anticipated the handbook may also be useful for other agencies, particularly justice, health and social care professionals.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lynda Wilson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Lynda" being more prominent than the last name "Wilson".

Lynda Wilson CBE
Director, Barnardo's NI

Section one:

Introduction

The scale of the issue

In Northern Ireland data is not recorded in relation to parental responsibility when individuals are committed to prison so it is unclear how many children experience having a parent in prison. Data relating to NI prison visits does however give some indication about the scale of the issue.

In 2013, almost 5,000 children visited the three prison sites in Northern Ireland – Maghaberry (2695), Magilligan (1218), and Hydebank Wood (943) (Torney, 2014). Over 25,000 child visits were recorded by the Northern Ireland Prison Service [NIPS] for this 12 month period – equating to 20% of total visits to the prisons. While some children visited on just one occasion, others visited several times.

While the relationship the individual children had with the prisoner they were visiting is unknown many will have been visiting a parent, most likely a father. As of March 2014, the prison population in Northern Ireland was 1,890, of which 72 were women (NIPS, 2014).

In addition, many children will experience a sibling or other family member being imprisoned.

Detailed NIPS data from 2013 illustrates that child visitors come from across Northern Ireland to the three prison sites here (Torney, 2014). There is a strong likelihood that in many of the 1180 schools in NI there will be a child/children with a parent or other family member in prison.

Schools therefore have a vital role to play in addressing the needs of children affected by imprisonment. Children with a family member in prison will come to school with particular needs and sensitivities. Recognising these needs is an important step in ensuring that the child feels supported, helping to maximise their learning potential.

By addressing these needs, schools will be able to plan more effectively for learning and be part of the process that can break the cycle of offending by raising achievement and aspirations.

The challenge for school staff

Although schools and their staff have a significant role to play in supporting children with a family member in prison, it may not always be clear to teaching and non-teaching staff how they can specifically support children who experience this issue. Furthermore, it may be that school staff have not worked with children with a family member in prison before, and they may be unsure how to approach the subject.

Educational priorities such as an emphasis on pupil attainment, school performance and student attendance may also result in staff feeling under pressure and pulled in many directions with not enough time to focus on other issues.

However, if school staff are able to provide sensitive support and proper consideration of the needs of this group of children, schools will not only fulfil their aims and educational priorities but also enable children to achieve.

Research has shown that parental imprisonment has a direct impact on children's academic attainment, socio-emotional development and behaviour, often escalating to school exclusion or truancy (Social Care Institute for Excellence [SCIE], 2008). School support for children with a family member in prison, therefore, is important as it will contribute to improving a range of educational and wellbeing outcomes for a group of children who are at risk of a number of poorer outcomes.



Reports focusing on the role of schools

There is a distinct lack of reports/strategy focusing on the role of schools in meeting the needs of children affected by family imprisonment in Northern Ireland. Instead many look more generally at child social inclusion and welfare across different sectors, for example:

- The ‘Ten year strategy for children and young people in Northern Ireland 2006-2016’ (OFMDFM, 2006) is based around six key outcomes for children¹; it outlines a ‘whole-child’ approach as necessary in all areas of policy development and service delivery relevant to children and young people. There is however a noticeable absence of any targets to identify how many children experience the imprisonment of a parent; nor is there any identification of these children’s needs or specific targets for meeting their needs (Scharff-Smith and Gampell, 2011).
- The ‘Families Matter’ (DHSSPS, 2009) strategy advocates more broadly for strong support between families, communities and services in an effort to prevent children being affected by social exclusion and social disadvantage. Although the strategy does not explicitly focus on the issue of parental imprisonment, it does state that organisations and the education sector working with children should encourage “better information sharing, putting in place common standards and ensuring that the focus remains on the child or young person”.
- Supported by integrated planning and commissioning across agencies and sectors, the NI Children and Young People’s Plan (CYPSP, 2013) aims to improve all children’s wellbeing in relation to the six high level outcomes of the Children’s Strategy.

¹ Being healthy; Enjoying, learning and achieving; Living in safety and with stability; Experiencing economic and environmental well-being; Contributing positively to community and society; and Living in a society which respects their rights.



The NIPS (2010) ‘Family Strategy 2010’ highlights the important contribution that families make in supporting prisoners; and, notably, a Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE, 2008) guide on prisoners maintaining family ties welcomed good practice in NI for demonstrating “what can be achieved when children are at the heart of systems.” However there is further work to be done in raising wider awareness about the needs of children of prisoners, including in schools. The picture is very mixed across the UK, with different levels of awareness, expertise and training in schools. The position is accurately summed up by the COPING² project (2012), which carried out research in Sweden, Romania, Germany and the UK:

‘Schools are the one institution that almost all children regularly attend. They are an important source of support for children with imprisoned parents and have potential to contribute to their emotional wellbeing. However schools are often unaware of the existence of the children of prisoners, or their needs. Where the fact of parental imprisonment becomes public knowledge, children can be bullied and stigmatised. Where teachers or other trusted school staff (such as assistants or school nurses) do know about the situation they can support the child emotionally, academically and practically, although this does not always happen.’

The aims of this handbook

Given the variety in responses made by schools to the needs of children affected by imprisonment, the aim of this handbook is to produce in an accessible format:

- Information about some of the potential main impacts of imprisonment on children, particularly as they affect children at school.
- Information about specific effects on children at different stages of what has been referred to as the ‘offender journey’.
- A framework for the Education Authority (EA) (and other relevant agencies), schools and school staff addressing the needs of children with a family member in prison.
- To share good practice for this group of children. As such wherever possible we have included the words of children and families affected by imprisonment, as well as examples of good practice.

This handbook is aimed at both primary and secondary schools. It is important to acknowledge that children of different ages will have different experiences of the imprisonment of a family member. The impact on a child or young person’s identity, networks of support, family relationships and levels of resilience will all be determined by their age. For this reason, the case descriptions included here reflect the experiences of children of various ages and the ways in which schools responded to them.

This handbook is written to offer a whole-school approach and has relevance not only for teaching staff but also for administrative staff, lunch-time assistants and non-teaching support staff. While the handbook is primarily aimed at schools, it may also be a useful resource for other agencies working with children affected by the imprisonment of a parent or other family member.

² Children of Prisoners, Interventions and Mitigations to Strengthen Mental Health

Section two:

The potential impact of a parent or other family member's imprisonment

Based on research and practice evidence we now have a relatively comprehensive picture of some of the potential impacts of a family imprisonment on the lives of children. We know that there is considerable variety in the way that children react to a family imprisonment and the impact that it has on their lives. It is, therefore, important not to assume that all children and families will require the same support or types of support.

In reviewing the effects of imprisonment it is important to see the 'whole child' and think not only about the child in their immediate family, but also their relationship with the child's family and their community or neighbourhood.

In this handbook we focus mainly on the impact of imprisonment of a parent, but we recognise that the imprisonment of other family members such as an older sibling, grandparent, or parent's partner may have an equal effect on a child. What is written here should also apply in those situations.

How children are affected

This section covers the following types of impact:

- Emotional well-being of the child.
- Impact on the child/young person's family and the 'knock on' effects directly for the child.
- The child in the community/neighbourhood.
- Impact at school.
- Long-term effects.

Emotional well-being of the child

Depending on the strength of the relationship between the child or young person and the parent or other family member in prison, they may experience some or all of the following emotional impacts:

- A sense of sadness about the loss of the parent.

'I didn't know he was going into prison, but I felt sad when I found out... I felt sad when I knew he wasn't coming home.'

(Seven-year-old boy; Gill, 2009)

- Concern about what is happening to the family member in prison, for example worrying if they are lonely or sad, or being hurt.
- Emotional difficulties, for example feeling anxious, not expressing their feelings and having sleep disturbances.
- Changes in behaviour.

'[My child's] schooling dropped severely. His behaviour changed pretty drastically. He was aggressive and loud and boisterous and things like that. Ok, yeah so you expect from a normal child, but there was a sort of anger in this.'

(Father in a NI prison describing his son; Scharff-Smith and Gampell, 2011)

The cumulative impact of the above effects may heighten the likelihood of the child experiencing mental health difficulties. The COPING project, which included a

survey of 291 seven- to 17-year-olds in the UK, attempted to assess what proportion of children were in need of specific interventions based on their mental health (Gallagher, 2012). It concluded:

‘The stand-out figure among this data is that at least 25 per cent of children aged 11 years or over – according to their parent or carer’s ratings – are at high risk of mental health problems... The proportion of children under the age of 11 years who are at high risk of mental health problems is lower than this, but still appreciable...’

Impact on the child/young person’s family and the ‘knock on’ effects directly for the child

Depending on the role and significance of the imprisoned parent in the family prior to imprisonment, the family may experience some of the following impacts, which may have ‘knock-on’ effects for the child:

- The parent left at home may be highly pressurised and dealing with their own sense of loss and feelings of anger about what has happened. This may have an effect on their ability to provide adequate parenting.

‘The hardest things are that you’ve got to keep the house going, you’ve got to look after your children, financially you’ve got to be independent and then you’ve got to mentally support someone else when you need that support yourself... I want something back for me, but I haven’t got that.’

(Partner of a parent in prison; Gill, 2010)

- Family finances may change significantly, for example if the imprisonment leads to the loss of a full-time income. There may also be costs associated with the imprisonment, particularly visiting costs.
- The family may have to change

accommodation, for example if they are no longer able to pay a mortgage, want to make a fresh start or because they have been made to feel unwelcome where they live due to the nature of the offence committed. This transience may lead to a breakdown in the child’s support networks, friendship networks and school attendance.

- In some situations the imprisonment of a parent may lead to a change of primary caregiver. This is particularly the case with the imprisonment of a mother.

Child in the community/ neighbourhood

Impacts on the child related to their or their family’s relationship with the community or neighbourhood may include:

- An increased likelihood of the family moving, thereby potentially cutting off the child’s access to established support networks.
- Stigma from parents of other children, who may not want their children to have contact with a child who has a family member in prison.
- A fear of ‘who knows’ and not being sure of the reaction of others.

‘If all my friends...if I told them and they were still my friends.’

(Ten-year-old boy asked what would make life at school easier while his dad was in prison; Gill, 2010)

- General community stigma and local tension or hostility caused by the offence. In some situations this may be the result of local media coverage of the offence; and sometimes the offender and victim of the crime live in the same locality.

All of the above social factors may also have a cumulative impact on the child’s opportunities for play and developing friendships, as well as a cumulative impact on the likelihood of the child being bullied.

Impact at school

Impacts on the child at school in particular may include:

- The child's concentration and schoolwork may deteriorate.

'Her school work is terrible. Her school report came home at the end of term and everything in it was about the last few months. It's quite obvious what's affecting it.'

(Partner of a parent in prison, talking about their daughter; Gill, 2010)

- Their behaviour may markedly deteriorate.

'Yes, I'm naughtier at school. [I'm] getting removed from lessons for being naughty and joking around. Sometimes I just get angry.'

(Thirteen-year-old boy with a stepfather in prison; Gill, 2010)

- The child may have been told by their family not to tell anybody in school. This may create tension and uncertainty.

'Haven't told the school. Told the children not to say anything.'

(Mother; Gill, 2009)

- The child and family may experience stigma and hostility from other families at school.

'After it was in the paper, I walked down [to] school and everyone there was looking. I'm thinking, it's nothing to do with me [and] it's nothing to do with the kids. But everyone had a little whisper as you walked past.'

(Mother; Gill, 2009)

- The child may experience bullying.

'There was an incident [with a] boy who knew about my dad and he would say loads of horrible stuff and the teacher wasn't going to do anything about it. They were just laughing about it.'

(Fourteen-year-old girl; Gill, 2010)

Long-term effects

In addition to the immediate impact on the child, research has shown that parental imprisonment has an impact on a child's long-term outcomes. For example, children of prisoners are approximately three times more likely to be involved in delinquent activity compared to their peers (SCIE, 2008). They are also more than twice as likely to experience mental health difficulties during their lives (SCIE, 2008).

Factors that can affect the impact on children

The experience of each child affected by a family imprisonment is unique. Research has shown that there is wide variety in the number and characteristics of support needs of children and families in this situation. For some families this will be their first experience of the criminal justice system, while others will have been involved for many years (Wright and Khan, 2010).

Individual children will have different needs for support, particularly in relation to mental health. Schools and other agencies must therefore be aware of the general impacts of family imprisonment on the child, but always see the individual child and the particular pattern of difficulties and challenges that they face.

Specific factors that can influence how a child is affected include:

- Gender of the child.
- Gender of the parent in prison.
- Previous home environment.
- How much families tell children about a parent's imprisonment.
- The nature of the offence.

Gender of the child

There is some evidence that children of different genders may experience different reactions to the imprisonment of a parent and the stages that follow, including release from prison. Murray and Farrington (2005) have noted that boys tend to show externalised problem behaviour while girls tend to have more internalised reactions.

However, this may depend on whether it is the mother or father who is imprisoned. Boys, for example, may respond differently to the imprisonment of their mother as opposed to their father, and vice versa.

Gender of the parent in prison

Although the impact of a father's imprisonment may have a major impact on a child, the imprisonment of a mother may have even greater consequences, particularly in terms of living or care arrangements.

Mothers are far more likely to have sole responsibility for childcare and as a result the child is much more likely to move from the family home if the mother is imprisoned. Research has shown that when a mother is sentenced, only 5 per cent of children remain in their own homes (Prison Reform Trust, 2000; Prison Reform Trust, 2012). While some children whose mother is imprisoned will be cared for by their father (Prison Reform Trust, 2012), many will either be looked after by wider family members (particularly grandparents), or enter the care system. If the child does go into care or live with foster parents, this may have implications for the mother, such as parenting issues, when she is released (Gelsthorpe et al, 2007). Furthermore, if the child does change living arrangements, this may also affect other personal and family relationships as well as relationships with key local professionals.

Mothers may also experience housing difficulties when they leave prison. Some women may lose their homes as a result of imprisonment. One particular dilemma may be a 'catch-22' situation in which the mother

cannot get accommodation unless her children are living with her, but she cannot have her children returned to her without accommodation (Corston, 2007). For the children this can extend the period of uncertainty and confusion.

The idea of imposing reduced prison sentences for mothers was rejected by the Corston Report (2007) which stated that, "short prison sentences do not successfully deflect from further offending and for many women make their lives and those of their children worse." A recent review of gender issues in Northern Ireland recommended alternatives to prosecution and custody for women in order to lessen its detrimental effect on children and reduce re-offending (Pooter, 2014).

Previous home environment

For some children, their lives may actually improve as a result of the imprisonment, especially where there has been disruption and turmoil as a consequence of a parent's offending behaviour. Specifically, improvement in a child's life may occur in situations where:

- There has been such tension and disharmony in the family that a parent going into prison produces a more stable and nurturing environment for the child.
- The parent going into prison has used a disproportionate amount of the family income for his or her needs and therefore as a result of imprisonment there are more financial resources for the child..

'[I'm] less stressed... Everything with the children is easier... There's peace and quiet, [and we're] financially better off. Everything is easier.'

(Mother of a five- and seven-year-old; Gill, 2009)

How much families tell children about a parent's imprisonment

Children will differ in terms of what they know about the family member's imprisonment. Parents may take the decision not to tell a younger child about the imprisonment at all, and the child may believe that the parent is 'working away'. If a child is told about the imprisonment, they may not be fully aware of the nature of the crime.

Some children may also be very unclear about how long the family member will be in prison, particularly young children whose concept of lengthy periods of time may be more limited. Many families may also be concerned about the consequences of fully informing their children about the circumstances, usually fearing a loss of love or respect for the imprisoned partner (Scharff-Smith and Gampell, 2011).

The nature of the offence

Different types of offence will have different impacts on the experience of the child. Some offences may produce significantly greater challenges for the child or young person than others. The offence may have directly involved the child as a victim. The most extreme cases will be when the child has been the victim of sexual abuse and the parent is in prison as a result. In these situations, in addition to the other damaging effects on the child, they may also feel in some way to blame for the parent being in prison.

Certain offences will also have a greater impact than others on the child's wider community or school setting.

Case example: Forced to move on

The family of an alleged offender received unwanted publicity which in turn resulted in the family experiencing verbal and physical abuse. The incident took place at the school with the family of those who were victims of the prisoner's crimes. The children's mother had to take them out of school and eventually had to move and re-school them elsewhere. Although the family felt that the move was forced they did manage to quickly settle into their new school.

(Based on interviews carried out with Northern Ireland prisoners; Scharff-Smith and Gampell, 2011)

Case example: Theft from a local employer

A parent has stolen a large amount of money from a local employer, causing the business to fold with the loss of several jobs. When the case was reported in the local newspaper following the parent's court appearance and committal, the family had dog excrement put through the letter-box and were shouted at in the street. The children were left out of community events, such as birthday parties, fetes and Christmas shows.

(Based on a number of interviews carried out with families; Morgan et al, not published)



Section three:

Impact on children at different stages of the 'offender journey'

The arrest, trial, court proceedings and potential imprisonment of a parent can be a long and distressing time for the parent, the child and their families. There are different stages in the 'offender journey', and schools should consider the different effects on children and families at each stage.

The offender journey has been presented by Action for Prisoners' Families in the following way:



Children may go through a number of 'transitions' as their parent or family member passes through each specific stage. School staff should be aware of the range of emotions that children may experience at each stage in order to best meet the child's needs.

Arrest

The first transition period is normally when the parent is arrested. Witnessing an arrest can be a traumatic experience for children and young people; while police officers may try to consider the needs of children, ultimately their role is to make a successful arrest. Arrests may take place at night or in the early hours of the morning, and police officers may not be in uniform or may be armed. A child's sense of security in their home may be significantly compromised as a result, and the child and their family are often left feeling confused and emotional.

Children and young people may respond differently to witnessing an arrest; for example, some children may be relieved that a family member has been removed from the family home. However, the research in this area suggests that children generally find witnessing an arrest a traumatic experience and may demonstrate general emotional difficulties including bed wetting, difficulties sleeping, nightmares and constant crying (McEvoy et al, 1999).

In addition, Evans (2009) notes that children who witness an arrest may become withdrawn both at home and school, and may experience low mood or depression. Children may also exhibit a sense of confusion, particularly if they do not have a clear understanding about what has happened and where the family member has been taken.

In these circumstances it can be difficult for family members to sit down and talk with the child about what has happened because very often they are experiencing their own distress. The remaining parent may be worried about or preoccupied with dealing with the arrest and its aftermath, and as a result the needs of the child may not be a priority at this time.

‘They probably hate the police for taking their daddy away but their daddy has done something wrong. So it’s trying to get them to understand the really bad of the situation you know.’

(Focus group; Scharff-Smith and Gampell, 2011)

Court appearance and committal

The initial period of committal to a prison sentence may be accompanied by uncertainty about what is happening to the parent. The child and family may not know where the parent has been taken, how to contact him or her, or what the visiting arrangements will be.

This stage of the offender journey may also be associated with anxiety about ‘who it is safe to tell’ and what to say about what has happened. In the early days of the parent or family member’s imprisonment they may be transferred between prisons, adding to the uncertainty for the children affected.

Imprisonment

With imprisonment families often find themselves in unfamiliar situations whereby they may become single parent families, experience financial loss and difficulty and be more vulnerable in the community.

In addition to the effects discussed in section two of this handbook, following a parent’s formal imprisonment children may also take on increased caring responsibilities or experience a breakdown in contact and support from their wider family (e.g. grandparents). The latter may be due to a change of accommodation or in some cases the wider family ‘disowning’ the prisoner’s family (Scharff-Smith and Gampell, 2011; Morgan et al, 2014). Dealing with the emotions and wishes of the child in often complex family situations can be one of the key roles for a school.

Case example: Support provided by a special school

Tommy, aged 13, had serious learning disabilities and attended a special school. His parents had split up and his father was serving a prison sentence for assault on his mother. His special school had been very supportive. Tommy had been helped to understand his feelings of loss at school. He described his father’s absence in prison as similar to someone such as a grandparent dying. This seemed a remarkable insight. His mother had no wish to be in contact with her former partner, but with help from a family support project she helped make arrangements for Tommy to visit his father in prison.

Tommy frequently had outbursts of rage at school. His mother said:

‘I think they have handled it very sensitively. They understood Tommy with this built-up anger and frustration when he lashed out. They used to take him aside and let him calm down and give him that time out. Then they would talk to him about obviously that wasn’t right for him to do that.’

The school’s contribution included guidance for Tommy to understand how he felt about his father being in prison. They understood and helped Tommy control his frustration, and helped him learn about acceptable classroom behaviour.

(Example drawn from interviews carried out by University of Huddersfield staff as part of the 2012 COPING project)

One of the key challenges for a school during the time of imprisonment is to recognise the demands that the child is facing and support him or her to continue successfully at school.

Case example: Helping children keep focused on their work

Fiona, aged nine, was looked after by her grandparents. Her mother was in prison, convicted of very serious offences, and she had split from Fiona’s father, who did not like her to talk about her mother. Her grandparents and her school were her main sources of support. Her grandfather visited the school regularly and had told them about Fiona’s mother.

Fiona described the support she received from school:

‘Say if I wanted my mum, [the teachers] would probably talk to me about it. They would probably say: “Calm down and go and wash your face because you have been crying. Wipe it with a paper towel and sit down and calm down and carry on with your work. There is nothing to worry about.” The teachers, they aren’t nasty, they are nice.’

Fiona knew that she could talk to her teachers when she needed to and that they would support her. The teachers’ focus was on making sure that Fiona knew she could count on them to help her, and at the same time make sure she could carry on with her schoolwork.

(Example drawn from interviews carried out by University of Huddersfield staff as part of the 2012 COPING project)



Visiting a family member in prison

A child may be in contact with a parent or family member in prison through letters, telephone calls and visits. Some children may see their parent in prison the maximum number of times that the regulations allow. The Government's basic guidelines state that a prisoner is entitled to a visit once in a period of 4 weeks, but additional visits may be allowed to any class of prisoner. Normally two adults, together with accompanying children will be allowed at each visit; however larger families can be accommodated if space is available (Department of Justice, 2012).

The level of contact the child has with the parent in prison through visits will also depend on a number of factors:

- The distance away from home that the parent is imprisoned.
- The strength of the relationship between the child's parents prior to going into prison, as well as the strength of the relationship between the child and their imprisoned parent (Scharff-Smith and Gampell, 2011; Martynowicz, 2011).
- The ability of the parent at home to take the child to visit, for example whether they have access to a car or can afford public transport (Scharff-Smith and Gampell, 2011).
- The prisoner's views about their child visiting them.

'It's taking them through all that searching as well. They have to get the [drugs] dog sniffed at them and my wee girl's two and she come up today, she was even searched at two years of age, you know patted down. And that's why I don't believe in my six year old coming up. Because she's going to get patted down [individually searched].'

(Prisoner, Northern Ireland, describing his children visiting him; Scharff-Smith and Gampell, 2011)

Prisons will also differ in the extent to which visiting arrangements are ‘family friendly’. Some prisons will have ‘family days’, where a real effort is made to facilitate relaxed and extended contact between the prisoner and their child. In prisons with less family-friendly visiting facilities, visiting times will be short, there will be little privacy and the visits will take place in a strictly controlled environment, often including the prisoner not being able to get out of their seat (Scharff-Smith and Gampell, 2011; Robertson, 2007). The prisons in Northern Ireland have made a real effort to facilitate relaxed and extended contact between the prisoner and their child. Following a review by the Prisoner Ombudsman that visits were too restrained, recommendations were made for child centred visits across all Northern Ireland prisons. It was also recommended that Magilligan Prison should make arrangements that once a month, every month, the children of prisoners are given the opportunity of a child centred visit with their father (The Prisoner Ombudsman for Northern Ireland, 2012). These visits, which are supported by NGO workers, place the child as the focus of the prisoner-parents attention. Other initiatives exist such as an extended visits scheme for mothers and children, children’s parties, and book-tape initiatives. Maghaberry Prison provides a range of services to visitors, such as tea/hot food, a play area for children, and support over concerns or difficulties associated with the visit.

Visiting a prison can be a time-consuming process and young children in particular may get tired and irritated by the journey (Scharff-Smith and Gampell, 2011). The whole family, including children, will have to go through a number of security procedures, including the use of sniffer dogs. As a result many families find travelling to the prison and the prison process draining, which can then impact on the time spent with the imprisoned parent (Robertson, 2007; Martynowicz, 2011). Travel costs to prisons can also be a mediating factor for families travelling potentially long distances to prison. The Northern Ireland Prison Visits Scheme offers financial help to close relatives of prisoners up to 26 visits a year.

‘It feels alright because you get to see him. But it’s upsetting. Just seeing him again, having to say goodbye.’

(Thirteen-year-old boy; Gill, 2010)

Research has suggested that the period running up to and after visits may heighten anxiety within the family, and children may show a range of physical, behavioural and emotional symptoms surrounding visits (Loucks, 2004; McEvoy et al, 1999).

‘He gets wound up easily and lashes out... He’s probably the one who’s been most affected by it. He still cries when we go and see him and he usually gets upset when we leave him. He tries to hold back the tears but you can see he’s just unhappy.’

(Mother talking about 10-year-old son; Gill, 2010)

Many children may also feel a deep sense of sadness about leaving their parent in prison.

‘It’s hard for [my daughter] to leave [her dad] after the prison visits. She just cries and cries. She knows she’s not going to see him.’

(Mother talking about six-year-old daughter; Gill, 2010)

Children may also worry about the safety of their parent or family member in prison (Scharff-Smith and Gampell, 2011; Robertson, 2007) and their understanding of what happens in prison may often be based on TV dramas or media reports, which may sensationalise what really occurs.

Overall, while visiting can be a difficult experience for children and their families, maintaining ties with a family member may have mutual benefits for both the prisoner and the child. For example, Dallaire (2007) states that visiting an imprisoned parent has been identified as a protective factor for children whose mother is in prison. It is therefore recommended that children do maintain

contact with their parent in prison as long as it is in the child's best interests.

Maintaining contact, however, largely depends on practical arrangements and support from the other parent or family members (Scharff-Smith and Gampell, 2011; Robertson, 2007) and schools (Morgan et al, 2013a, Robertson, 2011).

Schools can play a significant role in encouraging family contact by responding sensitively and constructively to requests for time off school to visit a parent or other family member in prison. Research has shown that where schools have been critical of children being absent in such circumstances, it increases tension within the family and often restricts visits to holiday times only (Morgan et al, 2013a). As a consequence, children can begin to lose contact with their parent as the time between visits is too long to sustain a meaningful relationship.

Furthermore, schools can support children and young people by providing additional emotional support and reassurance both before and after a visit (Ramsden, 1998). Poehlmann (2005) suggests that young children in particular may need additional emotional support and reassurance to cope effectively with prison visits.

Release from prison

The release of a parent or family member from prison can cause an array of conflicting emotions. While some children will be excited that their loved one is returning, other children may feel scared, worried or apprehensive. The roles and dynamics in the household may have changed during the imprisonment, so release can sometimes symbolise a period of change and readjustment. Children may feel anxious even though they may want to see their loved one again.

Following release, many prisoners have to learn how to be parents again and children have to adjust to having that parent at home. Where children have maintained regular contact with the prisoner, relationships may be more familiar or easier. However, if the child or young person has not seen

their parent or family member since the imprisonment, many things may have changed in their lives that will affect how they interact with that person. They may need time to get to know each other again.

McEvoy et al (1999) interviewed politically motivated prisoners and their partners in Northern Ireland and found that typically they worried about their relationship with their children, household roles, practical arrangements and getting to know each other again. Interviews with children have shown similar anxieties, as well as concerns that their parent may reoffend and they feel that they need to be watchful to guard against this happening (Morgan et al, 2013a).

Children who are expecting their parent or family member to be released from prison may show excitement and want to talk about the release. They may also be distracted and bothered by small details and practical arrangements. Research has identified that children often require additional support during this period, but very often official support services have ended due to the parent no longer being in prison (Morgan et al, 2013a).

Case example: Post-imprisonment trauma

The post-imprisonment period is a key stage that is often over-looked and can evince very different responses from the child. In this particular case the boy's father was serving a prison sentence. It was only after the father returned from prison that the child's behaviour become much more erratic, insecure and attached. The boy's behaviour became progressively worse, such as stealing and disruptive behaviour in school. The school was aware that the child's father was in prison and offered counselling in school to support the child.

(Case notes from Barnardo's NI Parenting Matters service)

Section four:

Strategies and good practice

This section aims to provide practical guidelines for the Education Authority (EA) and other relevant agencies, schools and school staff. Based on current good practice and research it should help them develop an accessible supportive environment for children affected by imprisonment.

The guidelines are summarised as checklists in Appendix One.

Identifying the children affected

One of the key challenges in this area of work is identifying the specific children who are affected (SCIE, 2008). Often the identification of the children of prisoners is dependent on local knowledge and quite often this knowledge is not shared with schools. Central collection of this information and its dissemination to schools is a function the Education Authority (EA) and other relevant agencies are best placed to facilitate.

One example of an organisation encouraging children and their parents to inform the child's school is Barnardo's NI Parenting Matters service.

Case example: Barnardo's NI Parenting Matters

Barnardo's NI Parenting Matters service offers support to prisoners and their families on parenting issues such as communication, managing stress, and child development. The service has developed several resources for mothers, fathers and children, which encourage parents to let the school know about the child's circumstances.

One such resource for children is the 'It's a Tough Time for Everyone' booklet and DVD. This comic format booklet explains to children with a parent in prison all of the information that they may wish to know. The story illustrates the whirlwind of emotions that a child may experience, such as "Did I make this happen because I was bad?" and, "What will my friends think?" It is also destigmatising and encourages the child and parent to speak openly about the situation so that the child can maintain a positive routine in their life, including at school. The story also shows the child visiting the prison where he is encouraged to maintain contact with his father. A simple glossary explains, in a child friendly manner, many of the terms associated with prison and the penal system such as remand and child centred visits.

Parenting Matters also provide a booklet specifically for mothers ('Supporting a Child when a Parent is in Prison'), which encourages them to let the school know that the child's father is in prison and that the teachers can benefit from this information while retaining confidentiality.

Support strategies

In this section we suggest a number of strategies to support children that can be implemented at three levels:

1. The Education Authority (EA) and other relevant agencies, e.g. health and social care; justice
2. School
3. School staff

1. The Education Authority (EA) and other relevant agencies, e.g. health and social care; justice

- Identify a designated key person at local level who is accountable for this group of children within the area. This person would be the direct contact for the designated person at school level (Morgan et al, 2013a).
- Organise training for all school staff on this issue (United Nations, 2011; Ramsden, 1998).
- Health, social care and education should work together to foster a systematic social support framework to meet the needs of the children (Boswell, 2002). All social workers and others working in childcare professions must be made aware of the needs and rights of children with imprisoned parents through a training module on professional development (Scharff-Smith and Gampell, 2011).
- Develop appropriate and sensitive information and leaflets for children, families and school staff on the subject (Morgan et al, 2013b; Ramsden, 1998).
- Develop relationships between key stakeholders and identify ways in which information about this group of children can be generated and shared in a confidential and respectful way. This could include the following strategies:
 - Placing information and leaflets in local courts that advocate telling the school in confidence.

- Placing information and leaflets in the visiting rooms of local prisons.
- Offender management services discussing the benefits of informing schools with the parents they are in contact with.
- Local agencies that work in the community promoting the needs of the children of prisoners and encouraging parents they are in contact with to inform the school.
- Developing steering groups that link representatives from key agencies / link in with the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership and Family Support Hubs.
- Develop policy that sets out how schools will support and respond to children affected by this issue. There are good examples of best practice that can be used as a framework or template, for example the guidelines produced by Oxfordshire County Council (Evans, 2009).

2. School level

The wellbeing of children affected by the imprisonment of a family member is something that can be improved at the school level. Schools can use the Checklists in Appendix One as the basis to collate evidence of how they meet the needs of this vulnerable group.

Schools should:

- Ensure that all staff within the school attend training on the issue, which should cover the effects on children, how children can be supported and children's experiences of visiting prisons (United Nations, 2011). Northern Ireland school staff lack training opportunities specifically for this issue (SCIE, 2008); good practice from Scotland, as highlighted in the following case example, illustrates how training can be administered in a creative manner.

Case example: Families Outside

The charity Families Outside (www.familiesoutside.org.uk), which supports the families of prisoners in Scotland, launched a series of continuous professional development (CPD) sessions for teachers within Edinburgh prison. Holding the sessions in the prison allowed teachers to see the environment of the prison itself and help them to better understand the experiences of the children affected. The sessions last two hours and include a conversation with a boy whose mother is in prison.

The aim of the training is to explore the impact that imprisonment of a close relative can have on children and to learn how school communities can support them and their carers.

The anticipated outcomes for the course are that school staff will:

- Be more confident in how to engage and support children and families affected by imprisonment.
- Understand the complex situations that families in this situation often experience.
- Be aware of resources and support available for schools and for families.
- Understand the importance of links between prisons and support agencies.

Families Outside aims to roll out this training model to other prisons, and other Scottish prisons have already expressed interest.

- Raise awareness of this group of children within schools (Morgan et al, 2013a; SCIE, 2008; Ramsden, 1998).

Case example: Barnardo's NI 'Time 4 Me'

Barnardo's NI 'Time 4 Me' primary-school based counselling service offers many interventions to raise awareness of and increase emotional well-being in children. The service deals with many issues, such as trauma, abuse, friendship and bullying; one of the most common referral categories is 'Family Problems' which also includes children with a parent in prison. The interventions utilised include therapeutic play, strength-based therapy, brief therapy, narrative therapy, and person-centred counselling. An independent analysis of the service (Cooper et al, 2011) found significant improvements in well-being and that it was overall an effective intervention for psychological distress in children.

"I just think that this counselling service is absolutely invaluable. We really, really need it... I would hate to lose it."

(Teacher)

"Teachers have noticed a change in me. Teachers notice me when I am good. I like that."

(Pupil)

For further information, email dave.stewart@barnardos.org.uk

- Develop a school policy on how children in this situation will be supported. Oxfordshire County Council has developed a school policy that could be used as a template (Evans, 2009). Link this school policy to the local authority policy and ensure that all staff understand and adhere to the policy (Morgan et al, 2014).
- Take a whole-school approach, particularly when it comes to dealing with any challenging behaviour from children in this situation.

- Identify a designated person within the school who will have responsibility for this group of children (Evans, 2009; Morgan et al, 2014). The designated school lead should link with the designated person at local authority level and be available to children and families within the school. This member of staff should have appropriate training and supervision and can act as a potential advocate for children in this situation.

Case example: Oxfordshire County Council named school lead

The Oxfordshire County Council guidelines (Evans, 2009) identify the following responsibilities of the designated school lead in relation to a child with a family member in prison:

- Liaise with other relevant staff on a need-to-know basis.
- Liaise with the families and/or other agencies as appropriate to establish the needs of the child.
- Keep the headteacher fully informed.
- Monitor the academic progress of the child and arrange additional support if needed.
- Act as an advocate for the child.
- Ensure that children who are new to the school have a smooth and welcoming induction.
- Ensure that the child has a member of staff they can talk to.
- Attend any relevant training.
- Act as an advisor for other staff and governors on issues relevant to the education of the child.
- Keep appropriate, up-to-date records.

- Develop an individual learning plan with the child and their parent/carer who is not in prison that identifies the support that the child may need (International Association of Youth and Family Judges and Magistrates, 2006).
- Recognise that in most cases, it is important for children to maintain relationships with parents in prison. In light of this, work with children and parents to enable children to have approved absences to visit their parent/relative in prison (United Nations, 2011; International Association of Youth and Family Judges and Magistrates, 2006). Understand that most prison visits need to take place during schools hours and prisoners are very often housed far away from their families. This should be recorded as an authorised absence within school registers.
- Be familiar with local services that work with children in this situation and liaise with these services so that families can be directed to appropriate support (Morgan et al, 2013a).
- Seek feedback from children and parents in this situation on how support in schools can be strengthened, how school policies can be devised and how schools can better support parents and children to inform schools about their situation. Involve the children themselves in identifying what would be most helpful. This is an important aspect of good practice as there is a danger that developing policies creates a top-down approach that does not allow for children's own input or empowerment. Children in this position will often have clear ideas of what approach is appropriate, as indicated by the following quotes:

‘Ask if they are okay, ask if they need help and be supportive.’

(Nine-year-old; Morgan et al, 2104)

‘Do it privately, not in front of everyone. I don’t want everyone knowing.’

(Twelve-year-old; Morgan et al, 2014)

- Develop a library of resources about the subject, such as books, leaflets and DVDs, for staff, families and children (Ramsden, 1998). The Barnardo’s NI Parenting Matters service, for example, has many useful resources such as the ‘It’s a Tough Time for Everyone’ booklet and DVD. Display materials so that they are accessible and not hidden away (Morgan et al, 2013b).
- Develop the pastoral support system, in school counselling, support interventions and mentoring schemes within schools to support children in this situation (SCIE, 2008; Morgan et al, 2013b). The SHINE for Kids charity in New South Wales, Australia, offers a good example of how to deliver a support group (Roberts, 2012; www.shineforkids.org.au). In addition, the Barnardo’s NI ‘Time 4 Me’ service is a good example of school counselling.
- Send school reports and other school updates to the parent in prison, where appropriate, to help keep them involved in their child’s education (SCIE, 2008).

However, remember to discuss this in advance with the remaining parent/carer and the child (Morgan et al, 2013b).

- Develop an ethos of working in partnership with parents and a culture of trust and support within the school, so that parents feel able to inform the school about imprisonment of a parent or close relative (Morgan et al, 2013a). This good communication can include the following strategies:
 - Promoting to parents that the school supports families affected by imprisonment.
 - Placing leaflets and posters in the community.
 - Including information in school newsletters.
 - Making links into community groups.
 - Inviting parents in families affected by imprisonment to help the school in identifying appropriate responses.
 - Inviting parents in families affected by imprisonment to help the school in identifying appropriate responses.

The following case studies illustrate the way in which schools can successfully respond to the needs of an individual child. These case studies in particular demonstrate a whole-school approach, in which different elements come together to support the child.



Case example: Working with schools

A four year old pupil with a father in prison was becoming very disruptive in class which prompted the mum to contact the school with regards to her behaviour. The father was worried about his partner and the stress this was causing her and their child. He asked for support from the Barnardo's NI Parenting Matters service operating in the prison as to how he could deal with this issue.

After discussions with a Barnardo's NI worker it was clear that the mother had not told the school that the child's dad was in prison. Although the mum was aware that this may have been an issue for the child, she was also afraid to let the school know her circumstances fearing that this could have a negative impact on her child in class. She later decided to disclose the information after agreeing it may be more helpful if the school had a fuller picture of life at home and how the child was missing her father.

The Barnardo's NI worker spoke to her about how she could approach the school and what information she may wish to share and offered to accompany her to the meeting. They met prior to this to discuss what she wished to say to the school. The school were very pleased to have this information as it helped them to understand the child's needs. Consequently, an action plan was prepared to help deal with issues agreed between the mother and the school.

(Case notes from Barnardo's NI Parenting Matters service)

Case example: Working with schools

'The school found out straight away that [my son's] dad was in custody through an outside agency. I may not have informed them at all, or even that quickly, but I was ultimately glad, as they were supportive.

'The headteacher asked for a meeting as soon as he had the visit from the police. He didn't push for information but told me he would like to provide support. I was honest with him about our situation.

'He made me feel less isolated, because he told me that others in the school had been in these sorts of situations. He asked me if I wanted [my son's] teacher informed: I felt in control.

'Later, when it became obvious that [my son] was angry and emotionally detached, and his academic achievements began to suffer, [the headteacher] met with me, asked me what I thought the school could do to help [my son] and made suggestions.

Some of the things the school put in place were as follows:

- Taking him out of lessons to help in a gardening club with younger children (having established he was responsible around younger children).
- Buying him a punch bag and gloves to give him a space to work off some of his anger: he was able to use a card system to let a teacher know when he wasn't coping emotionally.
- Arranging for him, and me, to chat with the school nurse.
- Providing a male teacher to act as a mentor to address the lack of male role models in his life.'

(Written statement from mother of a six-year-old boy)

School staff level

School staff need to recognise that children may find it very difficult to talk about having a family member in prison. The child may feel that this is private knowledge that is not to be shared.

As each situation is unique, it is important to be open to using a variety of approaches and to recognise that no single response will fit all circumstances. However, the following have been identified as useful guiding principles:

- See the child as an individual with individual needs. Recognise that imprisonment may impact on children in different ways (Ramsden, 1998).
- Be non-judgemental and reflect on your own attitudes. Remember that the child has done nothing wrong and that the child's parent or close relative is still a family member (Evans, 2009; Morgan et al, 2013b; Ramsden, 1998). It is also important for professionals to consider their own thoughts, feelings and expectations of the families of prisoners to ensure that we do not stigmatise this population through lowering expectations of them. Research suggests that girls with an imprisoned mother are particularly vulnerable to teacher stigmatisation through lowered expectations (Dallaire, 2007).
- Do not position the child as a victim or be overly protective (Ramsden, 1998). Recognise that the child is often very competent and may be offering support to others and trying to deal with the situation in their own way (Morgan et al, 2013b).
- Understand that although you may know about the child's situation because you have been informed by a third party, the child may not have wanted you to know and may not want you to mention it to them (Morgan et al, 2013b). The child is entitled to privacy and it is important not to put the child in a situation where they have to tell their friends about their parent/relative if they don't want to. Only those that need to know should be told and this should be discussed with the family and the child (Morgan et al, 2013b; Ramsden 1998).
- Be sensitive to the child's needs and offer sensitive and appropriate support. Acknowledge their views and choices, ask how they are, show interest in them and listen to them. Remember that you may be the only person listening to them (Evans, 2009; Morgan et al, 2013b; Ramsden, 1998).
- Be aware that children with a family member in prison may have very worrying thoughts about prison. Their images of prison are likely to be based on depictions in the media and films. This may be something the child seeks reassurance from the teacher about, hence the need for training and greater awareness on the matter.
- As professionals working with families affected by imprisonment, it is important to respect and support individual decisions made by families about what to tell their children. However, research and professional practice in this area suggests that where possible children should be told the truth using a child-friendly and age-appropriate format, and so teachers may be particularly called upon to give advice to parents about how to talk to the child about imprisonment. This can be a difficult conversation to have with a child, so plan it in advance and help the parent to prepare for any questions or emotional responses that the child may demonstrate. Discussing this in advance will support the parent but it will also mean that the school and the family are presenting a consistent approach to the child.
- Recognise the situation for the child may be more complex if the relationship between the two parents has broken down. For example, the child may feel caught between wanting to contact their father in prison and yet not wanting to make demands on the mother at home to facilitate visiting. Discussing issues such as this with the teacher may be particularly valuable for children in this situation.

- Recognise that the parent in prison is still the child's parent and they may want to know about the child's schooling. They have a statutory right to receive copies of school reports and other information sent out about their child. The child may also want to show their parent some of their schoolwork and this should be facilitated as best as possible. However, do not assume that this is always the case (Morgan et al, 2013b).
- Do not ask about the crime itself (Evans, 2009; Ramsden, 1998). This may be distressing or confusing for the child, and they may not have full knowledge of the crime.
- Be aware that the child may be concerned about who knows about the situation and what they should tell their friends. They may ask for advice about this.
- Appreciate that the arrest, trial, imprisonment and release of a family member can be a time of immense stress and uncertainty for children.
- Be aware that changes in behaviour may signal changes in home life, including the release of the close relative or parent from prison. Research has shown that the effects of imprisonment on children do not always end with the release of the parent (Morgan et al, 2013a) and very often a child who was previously coping may exhibit extremes of behaviour at this stage.
- Be sensitive to how a child may feel about visiting their close relative or parent in prison. Understand that changes in behaviour may occur after visiting.
- Where appropriate, staff may offer help to the child so that they can keep in contact with their parent, for example by helping them to write letters and create drawings (Morgan et al, 2013b) – as encouraged by the Barnardo's NI 'It's a Tough Time for Everyone' comic booklet and DVD.
- Attend training on the issues and keep up to date.

Case example: School-based family link worker

‘ [After completing training on this issue], I have now done some work with a young person whose mum had recently gone into prison. He was extremely anxious about his first visit and so I did two sessions before the visit with him, talked through his worries and looked on the website at what to expect when he went into the prison.

‘ He hadn't expected the dogs to be present and it was so useful to look at the film as he said he was scared of dogs. He also drew some pictures to take to his mum.

‘ This young person has severe learning difficulties and the anxieties were causing him problems in school. [The training gave me the confidence to sit] down with him, talk through what to expect and be able to show him that other young people have experienced the same issues.’

- School staff should be able to convey to the child that she or he is not alone. If resources are available, consider linking up children in the same situation. This would give the children direct support and help them see that within the school there are others who share the same challenges.

Case example: The school as a main source of support

Cassandra, aged 16, was not close to her mother. Her father had been sentenced to prison convicted of sexual assault against a child at her school, and there had been exhaustive social services enquiries and child protection case conferences.

Cassandra had found her school very supportive:

‘It was good because once a week I had a meeting with my head of year. If anything happened I could tell them and they were always asking if I was alright... There was one teacher [whom] I confided in a lot. They were both alright because I had known them for five years. So it was easier to talk to them than my mum, because I never talked to my mum.’

Although the family was seriously victimised by their local community, Cassandra kept her education going:

‘I just thought: why should they try and waste my education?’

(Example drawn from interviews carried out by University of Huddersfield staff as part of 2012 COPING project)

- Consider using ‘circle time’ or a ‘worry box’ to remind primary school aged children how to communicate any issues that are troubling them (O’Keeffe, 2008; Ramsden, 1998). The Barnardo’s NI Child Bereavement service suggests a ‘worry-box’ to be used by school staff and pupils.

Case example: ‘Worry-box’ (Barnardo’s NI Child Bereavement service)

In a primary school in Northern Ireland teachers have devised a ‘worry-box’ initiative to help children discuss bereavement and the trauma and grief following the death of a loved one. Each child writes down their worries and feelings on a piece of paper before placing it into the worry-box. The teacher then opens the box and discusses the worries in an age-appropriate and anonymous manner with all of the children. Teachers usually find from this initiative that almost every child has the same worries – this in turn helps the children by destigmatising the issue and illustrating to them that they are not alone.

Considering the similarities – in terms of emotions experienced for the children – between bereavement and having a family member in prison, the worry-box is recommended as an appropriate tool to help children discuss issues that are worrying them.

However, be aware that using more open initiatives such as circle time can put pressure on a child in terms of what they feel they want to share.

‘I know my friend’s got a dad in prison. She talks about it when we’re holding... like it’s called ‘special panda’ and you get to pass it around and talk about what it feels like to be sad... I couldn’t say anything so I just passed the panda around.’

(Seven-year-old girl with a father in prison; Gill, 2009)






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Section five:

Conclusion

Children affected by parental imprisonment are a largely hidden group and their voices are not heard. They are more likely to have low educational attainment, have problems with mental health and are at greater risk of becoming offenders themselves – the cost of not helping them is too high.

Addressing the needs of children affected by the imprisonment of a parent or other family member in Northern Ireland involves action at different levels. It requires the integration of action from the Education Authority (EA) and other relevant justice, health and social care agencies, the school and school staff.

Underpinning this must be recognition of the needs of these children and young people, and the vulnerable position they find themselves in. The emotional and practical difficulties of their situation are often compounded by the stigma attached to having a family member in prison.

Interventions at a local level that are most likely to make a real impact on the current lives and future outcomes of children and young people in this situation are those that combine general awareness-raising to address stigmatisation along with individualised support.

Most of all it is important to be supportive of children with a family member in prison. We will end the main section of this handbook with the words of one parent of a child in this situation, a teacher herself, who simply said: 'Please be kind to my child'.



Appendix one

Checklists for good practice

This handbook supports schools that work with children and their families who are affected by imprisonment. The checklists are designed to be used at Education Authority (EA) level, and also relevant health and social care; justice agencies, and at school level to assess how well these institutions are meeting the needs of families in this situation.

This handbook supports schools that work with children and their families who are affected by imprisonment. The checklists below are designed to be used at the local authority and school level to assess how well these institutions are meeting the needs of families in this situation.

Education Authority (EA) / other key agencies checklist

Item	Yes/No	Comments	Action plan
We recognise children with a close family member in prison as a priority group			
We include children with a close family member in prison in children's services planning.			
We have identified a designated key person at local level with responsibility for this group of children			
We have developed relationships with key stakeholders			
We have identified ways in which information about this group of children can be shared in a confidential and respectful way			
We have organised training for all staff on this issue			
We have developed appropriate and sensitive information, leaflets and other resources for children, families and school staff on the subject			
We have developed a clear policy on how schools will support and respond to children with a close family member in prison.			

School checklist

Item	Yes/No	Comments	Action plan
We have ensured that all school staff have attended training on the issue of children with a close family member in prison			
We have raised awareness of this group of children within our school			
We have a school policy that is linked to wider policy on how children with a close family member in prison will be supported			
All school staff understand and adhere to the policy			
We have identified a key person within the school who has responsibility for this group of children			
We have organised training for all staff on this issue			
We encourage the development of individual care plans with the remaining parent/carer and the child that set out the support that the child may need			
We have an ethos of working in partnership with parents and a culture of trust and support within the school so that parents feel able to inform the school about imprisonment of a close family member			

School checklist (continued)

Item	Yes/No	Comments	Action plan
We work with children and parents to enable children to have approved absences to visit their family member in prison			
We have an understanding of local services that work with children with a close family member in prison			
We liaise with outside agencies as appropriate			
We work with children and families in this situation to identify how support in schools can be strengthened			
We have a library of resources about the subject, such as books, leaflets and DVDs, for staff, families and children			
Wherever possible we work to provide the parent in prison with information about their child's schooling, including sending them copies of school reports			
We have developed the pastoral support system, in-school counselling, support groups and mentoring schemes within schools to support this group of children			
We recognise that because of stigmatisation this group of children may be particularly vulnerable to bullying, and we have effective anti-bullying policies in operation			

School staff checklist

Item	Yes/No	Comments	Action plan
I have attended training on the issue of children with a close family member in prison and keep up to date			
I see children and young people in this situation as individuals with individual needs			
I recognise that imprisonment may impact on children and young people in different ways			
My school enables me to reflect upon my attitudes to children with a close family member in prison			
I avoid treating children in this situation as victims or being over-protective			
I recognise the child or young person's competence			
II establish if the child or young person is offering support to others and trying to deal with the situation in their own way			
I remember the child or young person is entitled to privacy			
I am sensitive to the child or young person's needs and offer sensitive and appropriate support			
I recognise the importance of the family member in prison to the child or young person			

School staff checklist (continued)

Item	Yes/No	Comments	Action plan
I acknowledge the child or young person's own choices			
I don't ask about the crime			
I ask how the child is, show interest in them and listen to them			
I appreciate the stressful impact of arrest, trial, imprisonment and release of a family member			
Where appropriate I offer help to the child or young person so they can keep in contact with their parent			

Appendix two

Support organisations for families of prisoners

Action for Prisoners' Families (APF)

APF is the national membership umbrella body that works to reduce the harm caused by imprisonment to families. Membership is free to families and professionals. APF develops and produces resources, disseminates good practice guidance and influences policy at local and national level. It also runs events, develops and delivers the 'Hidden Sentence' training package, and provides its members with advice and information and a fortnightly news bulletin. APF has produced a series of children's books and DVDs for use by families and professionals as well as an information sheet for schools. Regional managers can provide awareness-raising sessions across the country. Please see the website for a full list of services and contact details.

Tel 020 8812 3600
Web www.prisonersfamilies.org.uk
Email info@prisonersfamilies.org.uk
Address Unit 21, Carlson Court, 116 Putney Bridge Road, London SW15 2NQ

Barnardo's NI Parenting Matters (Northern Ireland)

The Parenting Matters service works in all three prisons in Northern Ireland, providing support and information to parents in custody. It offers a range of programmes covering the issues parents may face at various stages of their sentence. Where required it also offers individual support to parents not ready to take part in group sessions. The overall aim of its programmes is to enhance parent-child relationships, improve parent knowledge and confidence, and help parents understand the effect their behaviours and choices can have on their child.

Tel 028 9064 4335
Web www.barnardos.org.uk/parentingmatters.htm
Email deirdre.sloan@barnardos.org.uk or niparenting.matters@barnardos.org.uk

Department of Justice

The Department of Justice website has information about all the prisons in Northern Ireland, including information for visitors.

Web www.dojni.gov.uk

Extern

Extern provides support services to a range of vulnerable and marginalised people including children, young people, adults and families.

Tel 028 9084 0555
Fax 028 9084 7333
Web www.extern.org/index.php
Email info@extern.org

i-HOP

Details of local and national support organisations for families can all be found on the i-HOP website. i-HOP (Information Hub on Offenders' Families for Professionals – run by Barnardo's in partnership with POPS) provides an online hub that includes up to date details about support services for families, research, policy, resources for professionals and families, details of training for professionals, events and so on. Information can be filtered by local area and category. There is also a free helpline for professionals, open Monday – Friday, 9-5.

Tel 0808 802 2013
Web www.i-hop.org.uk
Email i-hop@barnardos.org.uk

NIACRO

The Northern Ireland Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders (NIACRO) provides a range of services to children, young people, adults and families impacted by offending.

Tel 028 9032 0157
Web www.niacro.co.uk
Email niacro@niacro.co.uk

Prison Chat UK

Prison Chat UK is an online community that gives support to families and friends of prisoners.

Web www.prisonchatuk.com

Prison Fellowship

Prison Fellowship is a Northern Ireland registered charity affiliated to Prison Fellowship International offering support to prisoners, ex-prisoners and their families.

Tel 028 9024 3691
Web www.pfni.org/
Email info@pfni.org

Prison Reform Trust Advice and Information Service

The Prison Reform Trust's Advice and Information Service provides information on prison rules and procedures, prisoners' rights and how to get help in prison. It also has a free-phone line for prisoners.

Tel 0808 808 2003 (prisoners' family helpline); 020 7251 5070
Web www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk
Email adviceandinformation@prisonreformtrust.org.uk
Address 15 Northburgh Street
 London EC1V 0JR

Probation Board for Northern Ireland

The PBNI website has information explaining the work they do within the courts, prisons and the community.

Tel 028 9026 2400
Fax 0300 123 3290
Web www.pbni.org.uk
Email info@pbni.gsi.gov.uk

Quaker Service

The range of services provided by the Quaker Service includes the prison visitors' centre at Maghaberry Prison.

Tel 028 9020 1444
Fax 028 9020 1881
Web www.quakerservice.com
Email info@quakerservice.com

Start 360

Start360 provide a range of services and interventions in the areas of health, justice and employability, including work directly in prisons.

Tel 028 9043 5810
Web www.start360.org
Email info@start360.org

Appendix three

Material suitable for use in schools as training material

Action for Prisoners' Families (APF)

APF has produced several DVDs including *Homeward Bound* (2006), in which a theatre group powerfully captures the tensions in a family as the father is about to be released from prison. It also has a list of useful resources for professionals including the *Outsiders* series for families.

Tel 020 8812 3600
Web www.prisonersfamilies.org.uk
Email info@prisonersfamilies.org.uk
Address Unit 21, Carlson Court, 116 Putney Bridge Road, London SW15 2NQ

Barnardo's NI Parenting Matters

Contact the service directly for information about current training materials.

Tel 028 9064 4335
Email deirdre.sloan@barnardos.org.uk or niparenting.matters@barnardos.org.uk

i-HOP

Details of training materials and resources for professionals can be found on the i-HOP website. i-HOP (Information Hub on Offenders' Families for Professionals – run by Barnardo's in partnership with POPS) provides an online hub that includes up to date details about support services for families, research, policy, resources for professionals and families, details of training for professionals, events and so on. Information can be filtered by local area and category. There is also a free helpline for professionals, open Monday – Friday, 9-5.

Tel 0808 802 2013
Web www.i-hop.org.uk
Email i-hop@barnardos.org.uk

Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE)

- Children of prisoners:
Maintaining family ties Guide 22 (2008)
- E-learning:
Children of prisoners: An introduction
- The pathway from arrest to release
- Approaches to practice with children of prisoners

Web www.scie.org.uk

Appendix four

Material suitable for direct use with children

Action for Prisoners' Families (APF)

APF has produced several books suitable for children:

- Children of prisoners: Maintaining family ties Guide 22 (2008)
- E-learning:
- Children of prisoners: An introduction
- The pathway from arrest to release
- Approaches to practice with children of prisoners

Tel 020 8812 3600
Web www.prisonersfamilies.org.uk
Email info@prisonersfamilies.org.uk
Address Unit 21, Carlson Court, 116 Putney Bridge Road, London SW15 2NQ

Barnardo's NI Parenting Matters

Parenting Matters has developed a number of resources for prisoners and their families, including *It's a tough time for everyone*, a booklet and DVD that helps children come to terms with their parent's imprisonment, and *Family ties: Information for when a mum is in prison*.

Tel 028 9064 4335
Email niparenting.matters@barnardos.org.uk

i-HOP

Details of materials and resources to use directly with children can be found on the i-HOP website. i-HOP (Information Hub on Offenders' Families for Professionals – run by Barnardo's in partnership with POPS) provides an online hub that includes up to date details about support services for families, research, policy, resources for professionals and families, details of training for professionals, events and so on. Information can be filtered by local area and category. There is also a free helpline for professionals, open Monday – Friday, 9-5. The resources below for children and many more can all be found on i-HOP.

Tel 0808 802 2013
Web www.i-hop.org.uk
Email i-hop@barnardos.org.uk

Appendix five

Organisations that can provide training sessions for school staff

Action for Prisoners' Families (APF)

APF runs training days across the country as well as trainer-training courses for those who want to deliver its 'Hidden Sentence' training. Its five regional managers also hold up-to-date information on local organisations that could provide training for schools.

Tel 020 8812 3600
Web www.prisonersfamilies.org.uk
Email info@prisonersfamilies.org.uk
Address Unit 21, Carlson Court, 116 Putney Bridge Road, London SW15 2NQ

Barnardo's NI Parenting Matters

Contact the service directly for information about current training.

Tel 028 9064 4335
Email deirdre.sloan@barnardos.org.uk
or niparenting.matters@barnardos.org.uk

i-HOP

Details of training for school staff can be found on the i-HOP website. i-HOP (Information Hub on Offenders' Families for Professionals – run by Barnardo's in partnership with POPS) provides an online hub that includes up to date details about support services for families, research, policy, resources for professionals and families, details of training for professionals, events etc. Information can be filtered by local area and category. There is also a free helpline for professionals, open Monday – Friday, 9-5. The below and more can be found on i-HOP.

Tel 0808 802 2013
Web www.i-hop.org.uk
Email i-hop@barnardos.org.uk

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**Children affected by the
imprisonment of a family member**

*A handbook for schools developing
good practice*

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